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HARRIS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS APPROVE FIRST OF ITS KIND COMMUNITY-LED MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR YOUTH JUSTICE COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

Groundbreaking Fund will create a new public safety model that shifts money away from incarceration towards youth programs and services

Houston, TX (February 10, 2021) - The Harris County Commissioners Court approved on Tuesday a groundbreaking multi-million-dollar Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund. The first of its kind in Texas, the Fund will re-envision public safety for youth in Harris County by investing in community programs that keep youth from becoming involved in crime and prevent youth incarceration. The Fund aims to address racial disparities in juvenile detention and is part of a bold new approach to justice that begins with investing in communities impacted by incarceration.

"The Reinvestment Fund is part of a groundbreaking vision for youth justice — a vision that institutions do not own. Instead of maintaining the punitive status quo, this Fund will help to directly invest in the communities that are home to many Black and Latinx youth and families that have been neglected for far too long," said **Assata Richards, Redefining Youth Justice Coalition**.

"The future of our county depends on our children. We've taken steps to invest in early childhood education, and we must also take steps to ensure that children who become involved in the justice system are not thrown away by our society. Evidence shows that alternatives to incarceration for kids lead to better safety outcomes and more productive future citizens. We will continue our commitment to evidence-based decisions when it comes to making our community safer. This is about making sure that kids involved in the justice system are held accountable but are also given an opportunity to become productive members of our society. The Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund is another important piece of our work to reshape the justice system in ways that improve public safety and address inequity at the same time," stated **Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo**, who voted in favor of the Fund.

The Reinvestment Fund is comprised of funds initially earmarked for juvenile probation, as well as \$2 million from the county's General Fund. The Fund will invest in grassroots service providers based in neighborhoods most impacted by the juvenile justice system and employ staff who reflect the youth and families they serve. The Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, which has been a partner in this effort, is fully committed to this innovative approach.

Multiple organizations and individuals with first-hand experience made their voices heard in Commissioners' Court to support the Fund. Directly impacted youth and families, youth-serving organizations and advocates, and government officials supported the Youth Justice Reinvestment Fund as part of a new vision for youth justice in Harris County. Over 60 signatories sent [a letter of support to the Commissioners](#). Many of these supporters have been working with the Justice Administration Department, as well as the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, to find alternatives to youth incarceration even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, the need for the Reinvestment Fund became more evident as the pandemic became lethal for people confined in prisons and jails.

"Our department is committed to working with community groups to ensure Harris County youth will be served by those who know them best and are from their community," said **Henry Gonzales, Executive Director of the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department**. "This new fund will allow us to continue doing this in a more robust and streamlined manner and increase community capacity to help more - Black and Latinx youth stay on the right track."

[Evidence](#) shows that community investment promotes "a more durable, 'thicker' brand of community safety to replace the 'thin' kind that reliance on imprisonment provides." While incarceration often [worsens](#) youth behavior, community investments have been shown to work.

This initiative will also contribute to prevention work for youth and families to entering typically poverty systems, by re-engaging them to employment and education (opportunity youth), and supported with services like mental health, typically protective factors to avoid landing in extremes events (e.g., homelessness).

The Justice Administration Department is now facilitating an accessible "get-ready" period to prepare interested organizations to bid on contracts to serve as the Fund's backbone organization and third-party evaluator. Once hired, the backbone organization will select grassroots service providers to fund, strengthen, and coach for the pilot project's duration.

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About the Justice Administration Department: The Justice Administration Department (JAD) was created by the Commissioners Court to act as a resource for all County Criminal and Juvenile Justice Agencies. The Department coordinates amongst stakeholders and provides the members of Commissioners Court, County Criminal and Youth Justice leaders policy research, data analysis, and solutions meant to increase public safety, fairness, equity, efficiency, and accountability throughout the Harris County justice system. For more information, visit <https://jad.harriscountytexas.gov>

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